

Vol.1 No.5



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This book is intended for readers aged 18 and up. It may contain themes considered "mature."

ASHES, ASHES

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FIRST THINGS FIRST...



WE'LL LEAVE THE
MOTORCYCLES HERE
AND TAKE BICYCLES.

SERIOUSLY,
FRANCOIS?
WHY?!

WE'LL COVER
A LOT MORE
GROUND ON
MOTORBIKES!



MAYBE... BUT WE
WON'T GET NEARLY
AS FAR.

I WON'T ALLOW US TO
BE DEPENDENT ON OIL.



THIS IS A NEW AGE...
WE CAN ONLY COUNT
ON OURSELVES!



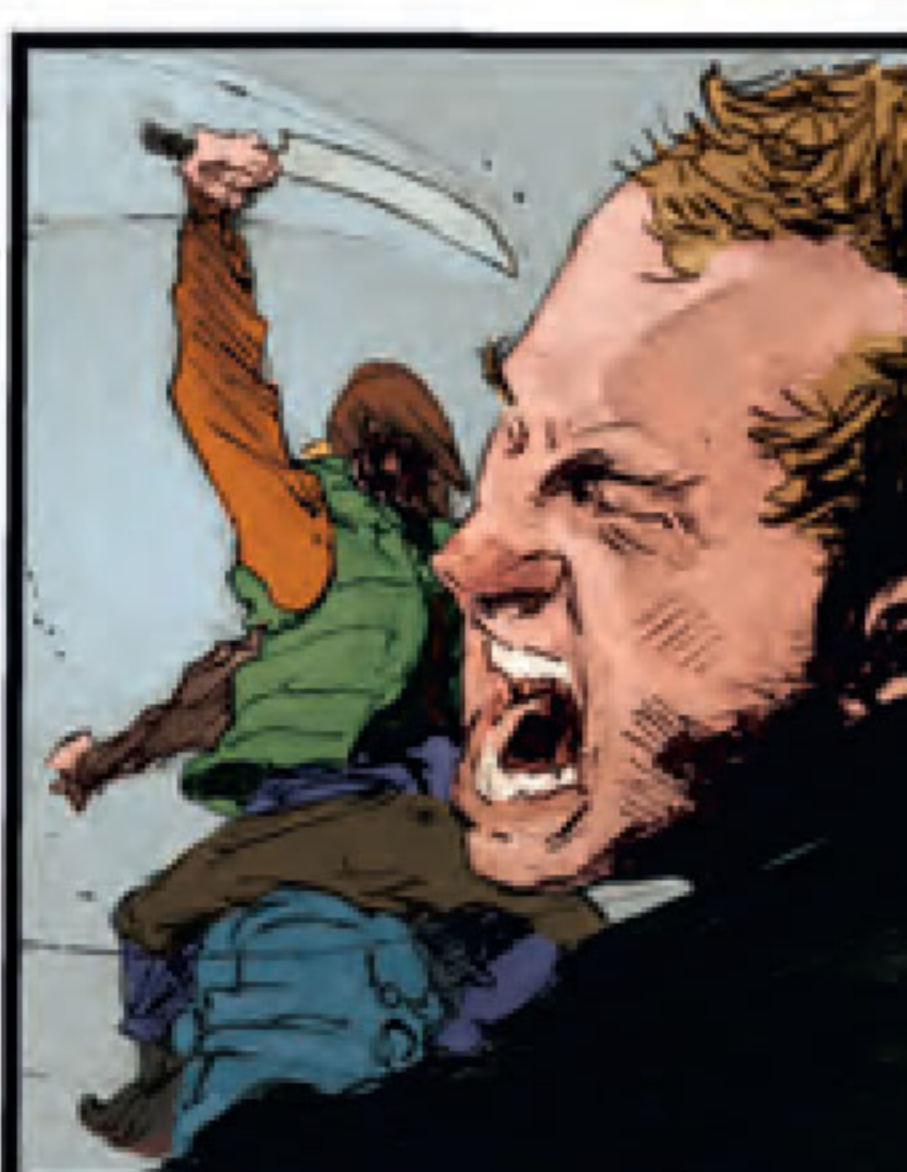
HUH?

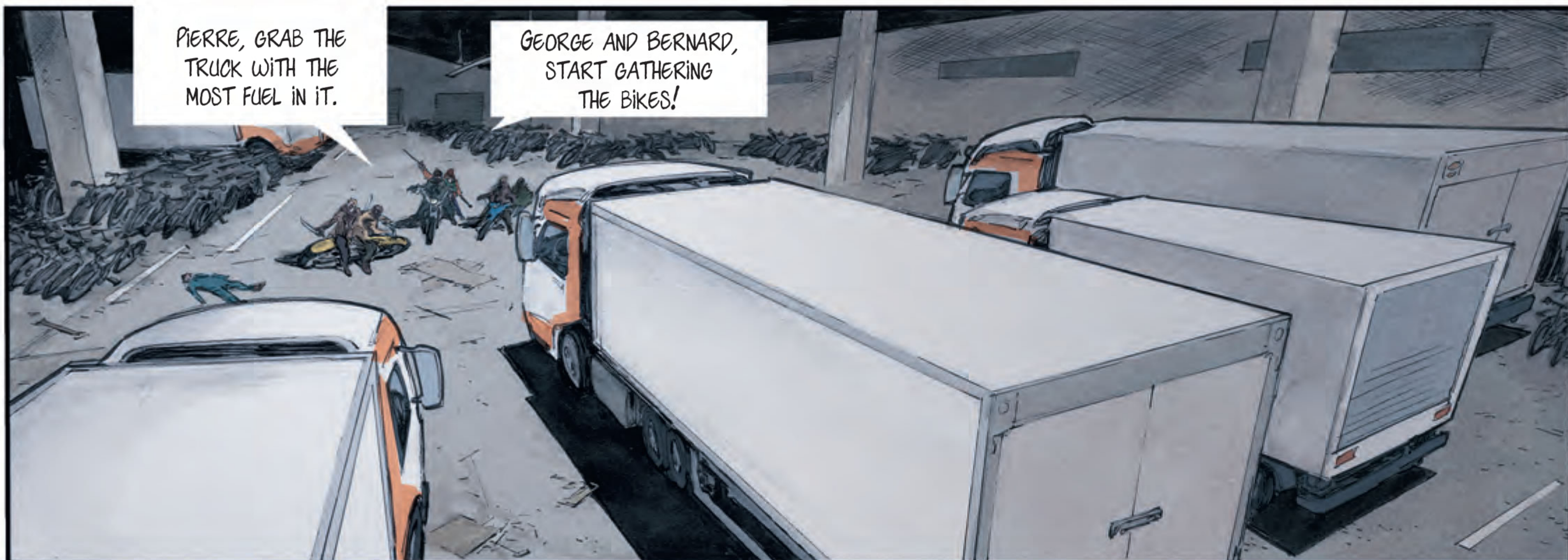


WHAT...



URGHH!





PIERRE, GRAB THE TRUCK WITH THE MOST FUEL IN IT.

GEORGE AND BERNARD, START GATHERING THE BIKES!



MOVE IT!



WE'LL TAKE CARE OF THE GUARDS!



GEORGE, LOAD EVERYTHING INTO THIS ONE!



HURRY!

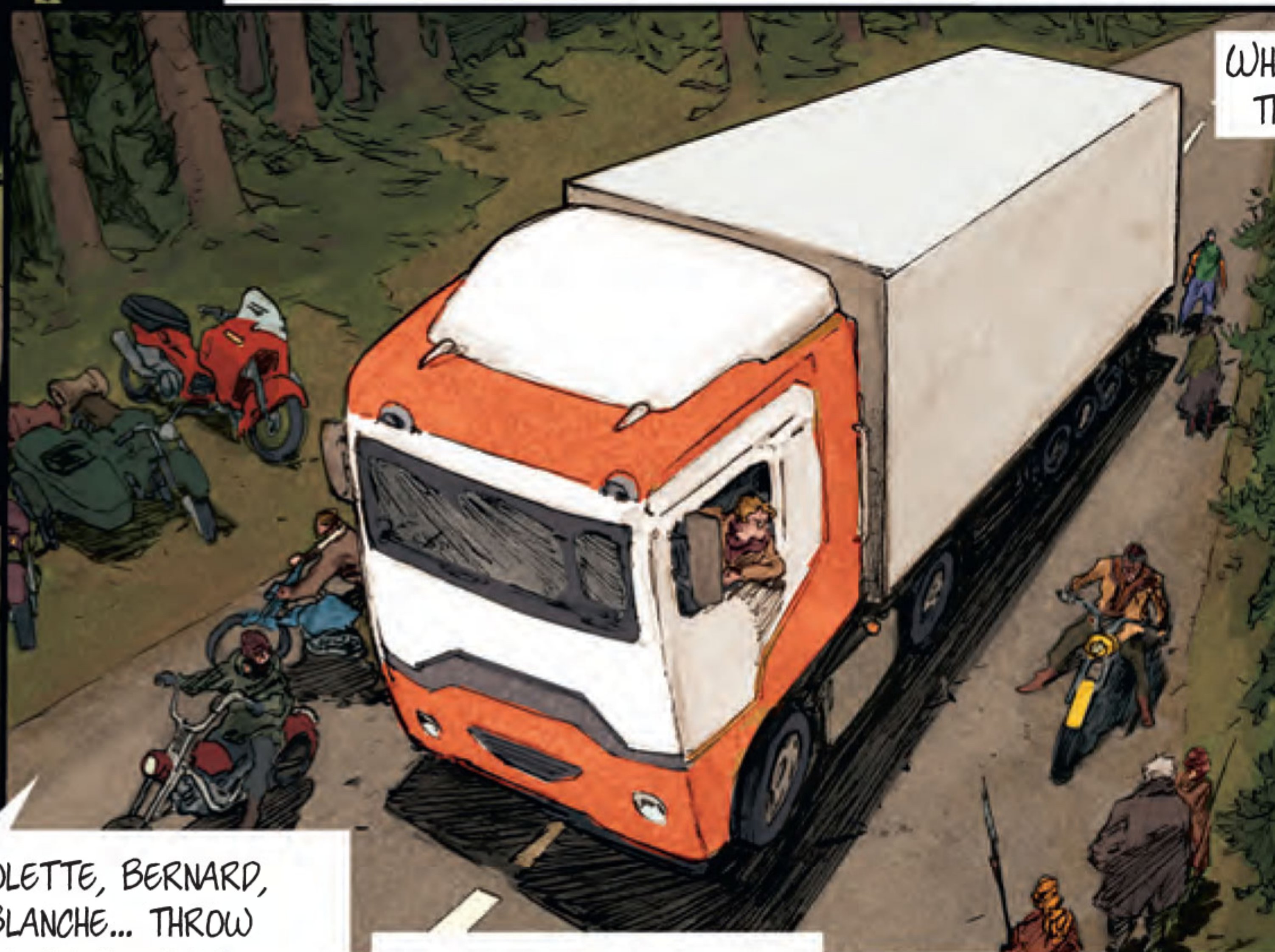


LET'S GO!



THERE!

THEY HAVE A TRUCK...



WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE MOTORCYCLES?

COLETTE, BERNARD, BLANCHE... THROW EVERYTHING INSIDE.

WE'VE GOT PEOPLE ON OUR TAILS!



IF WE LEAVE THEM, OUR
PURSUERS WILL USE THEM
TO CATCH UP...



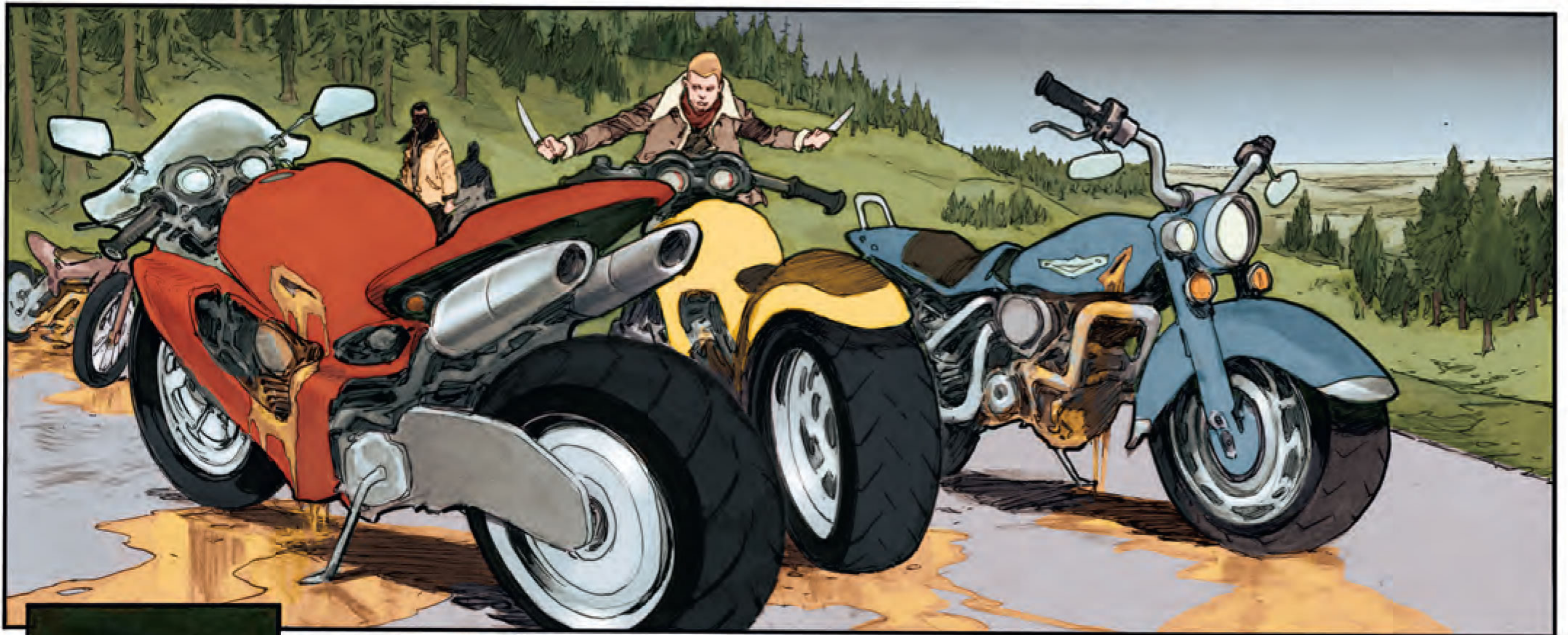
HELP ME PUNCTURE
THE TANKS!



LINE THEM UP TO
BLOCK THE ROAD!

FASTER, THEY'RE
COMING!

ALL SET!





SO, ALL IN FAVOR?



AND WHO'S AGAINST?

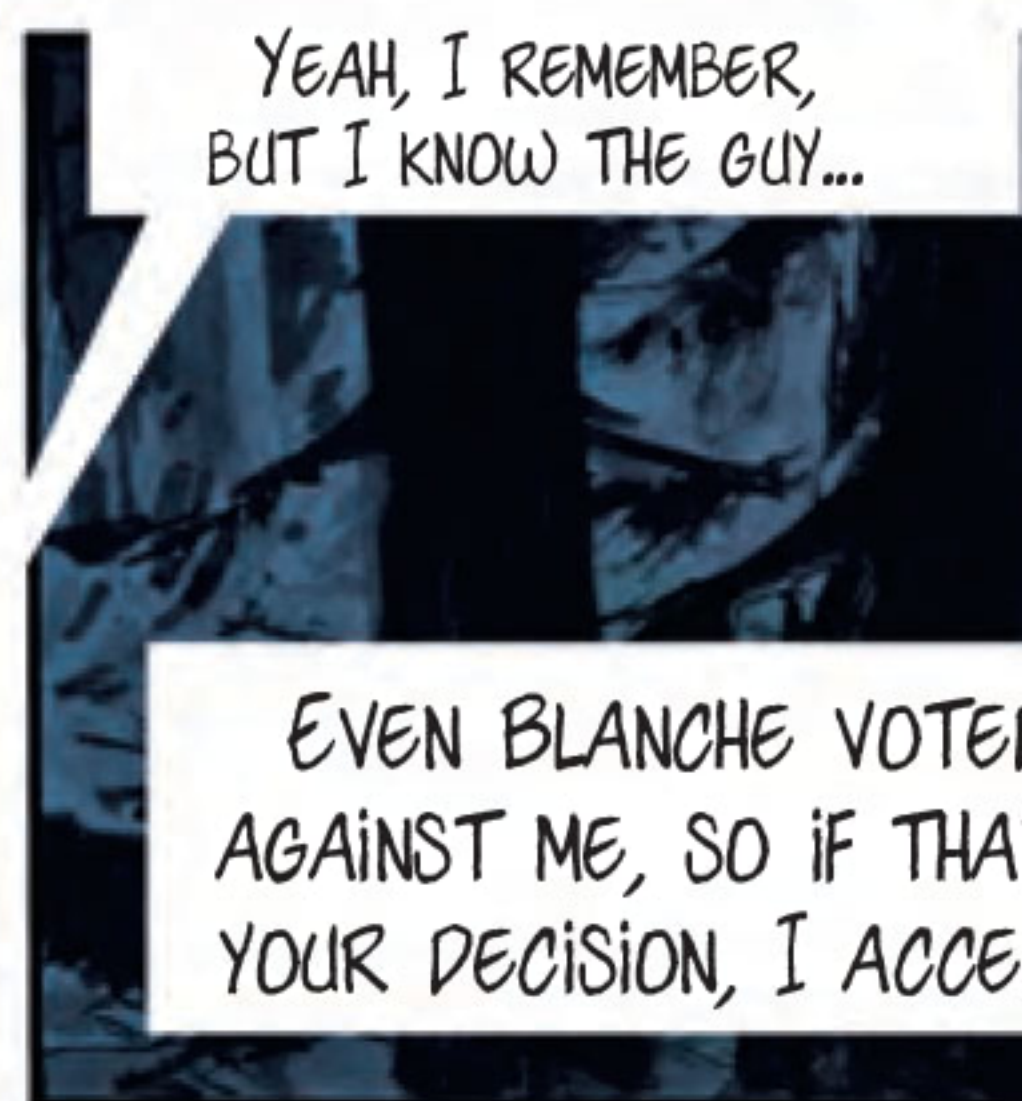


SEVEN TO TWO!

SO WE'RE KEEPING THE TRUCK.

DON'T REJOICE TOO QUICKLY...

WHY? HE SAID HE'D RESPECT THE MAJORITY'S DECISION...



YEAH, I REMEMBER, BUT I KNOW THE GUY...

EVEN BLANCHE VOTED AGAINST ME, SO IF THAT'S YOUR DECISION, I ACCEPT.



LOOK AT US...

...WE'RE TIRED, FRANCOIS.



WE'RE JUST NOT BUILT FOR THIS KIND OF JOURNEY.



EXACTLY!



IF YOU WANT TO SURVIVE, YOU'LL NEED TO TOUGHEN UP.

BIKING WILL MAKE US STRONGER!

EVEN IF I AGREED WITH YOU, RIDING A BIKE ISN'T ALL THAT TOUGH...



MAYBE NOT FOR AN EX-CHAMP LIKE YOU, BUT WE'LL DIE BEFORE WE GET THERE.

ON THE CONTRARY, THE SAFER YOU FEEL, THE MORE VULNERABLE YOU'LL BE.

WITH ALL OF US IN THAT VEHICLE, IT'LL BE EASY FOR BANDITS TO SPOT US.

ONCE RAIDERS COME AFTER US, THEY'LL BLOW OUT THE TIRES AND WAIT FOR US TO LEAVE, KILLING US ONE BY ONE.

ON BIKES, WE'LL BE MORE MOBILE.

THAT'S TRUE, BUT WITH A LITTLE LUCK, WE'LL GET TO OUR DESTINATION FASTER.

SETTLING DOWN WILL BE EVEN MORE DANGEROUS THAN TRAVELING!

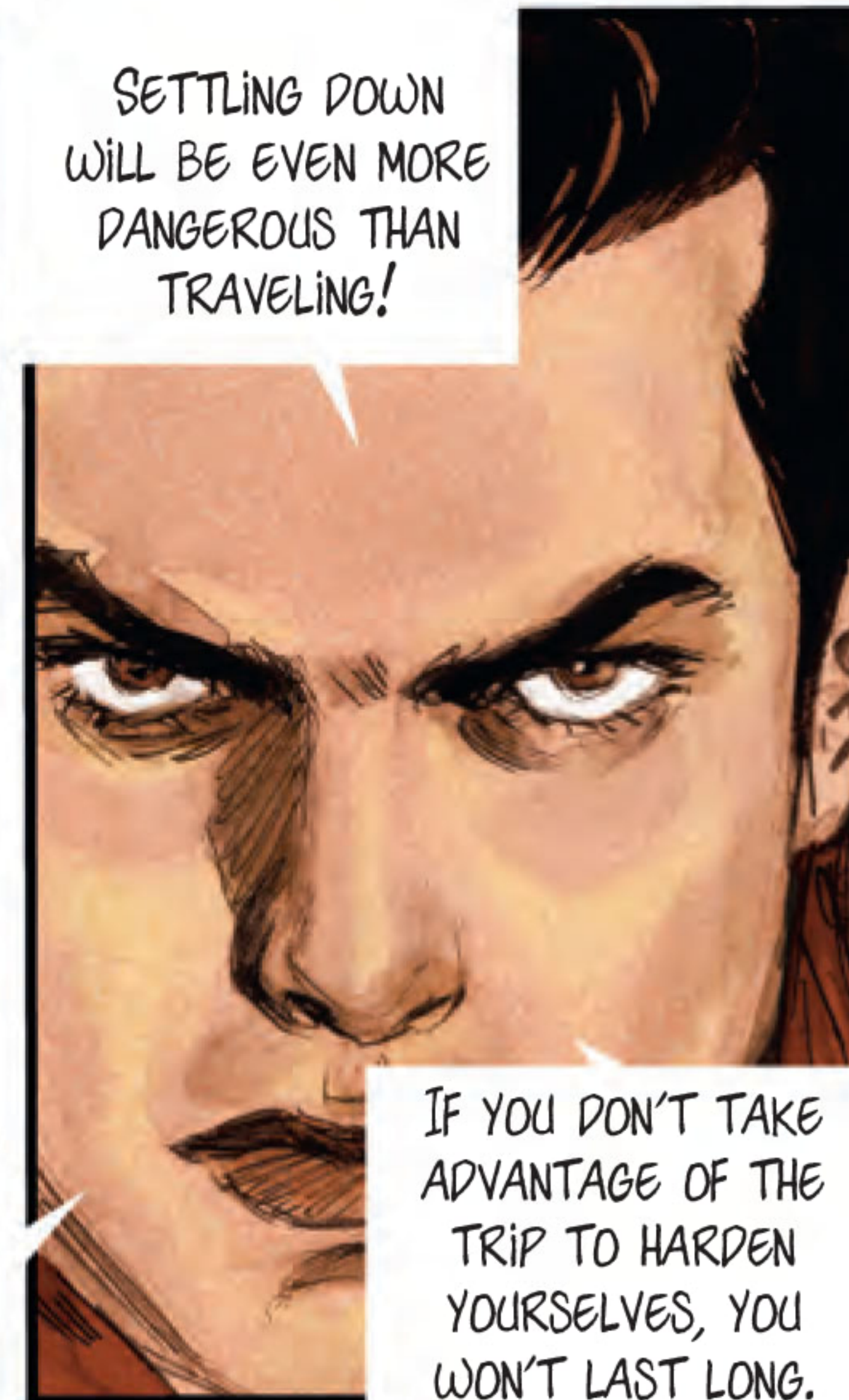


AND IF THINGS GET ROUGH, WE CAN ALWAYS SPLIT UP AND REGROUP LATER.



AND THEN WHAT?

DO YOU THINK THE SOUTH WILL BE AN EASY PARADISE?



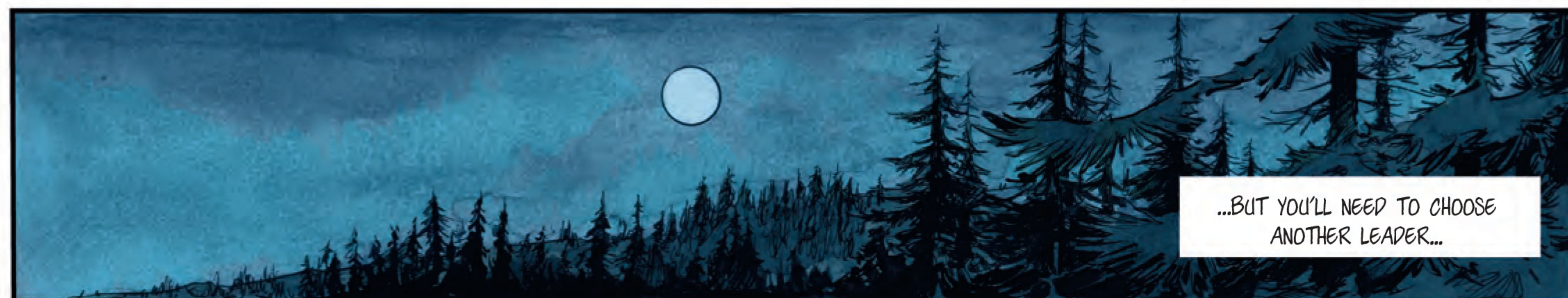
IF YOU DON'T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE TRIP TO HARDEN YOURSELVES, YOU WON'T LAST LONG.



CONTRARY TO WHAT YOU JUST SAID, COLETTE, I DON'T WANT TO TAKE THAT CHANCE.



SO IF YOU REALLY WANT US TO KEEP THE TRUCK, I'LL GO ALONG WITH YOUR CHOICE. I HAVE TO PROTECT BLANCHETTE...



...BUT YOU'LL NEED TO CHOOSE ANOTHER LEADER...



WELCOME, TRAVELERS!



DON'T HIT ME! YOU'D ONLY BE KILLING A DEAD MAN!

DO I SEEM LIKE I'M ALIVE?



I COULD HAVE BLED YOU BEFORE YOU EVEN HEARD ME COMING...

LOWER YOUR WEAPONS, YOU'D ONLY BE HITTING AN OLD SACK OF BONES.



LOOK AT THIS PLACE!



THE ADMIRAL'S SEVEN DAUGHTERS ARE INSIDE! I KNOW THEM!

I SAW THEM ARRIVE, ONE AFTER THE OTHER, WHEN THEIR FATHER BROUGHT THEM BACK FROM THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD!



THEY WERE ALL TINY WHEN THEY GOT HERE, EACH ONE CARRIED IN BY A WET NURSE FROM THEIR HOMELAND!

THERE'S A FAT BLONDE FROM THE NORTH, WITH EYES THE COLOR OF HONEY!



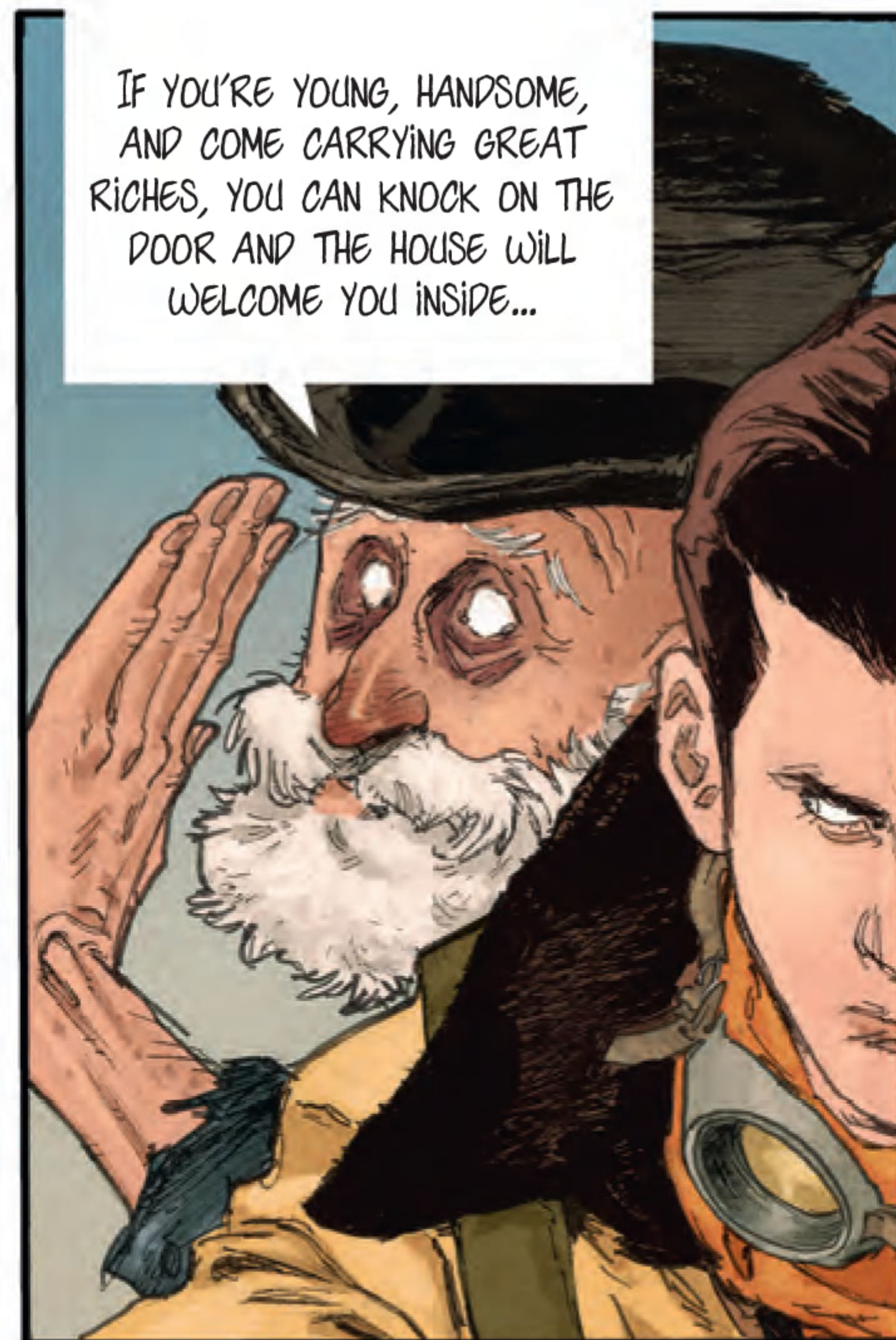
THE YOUNGEST IS FIFTEEN!

SHE'S AN ASIAN WITH OBSIDIAN HAIR! HER NAILS ARE AS RED AS BLOOD!



THE MOST HANDSOME MEN OF THE CITY
HAVE VISITED THIS HOME AND WIPE
THEIR LIPS ON THE LACE SHEETS OF
AT LEAST ONE OF THE ADMIRAL'S
DAUGHTERS!

NEITHER PLAGUE, FAMINE,
NOR CATASTROPHE HAVE
CHANGED A THING!

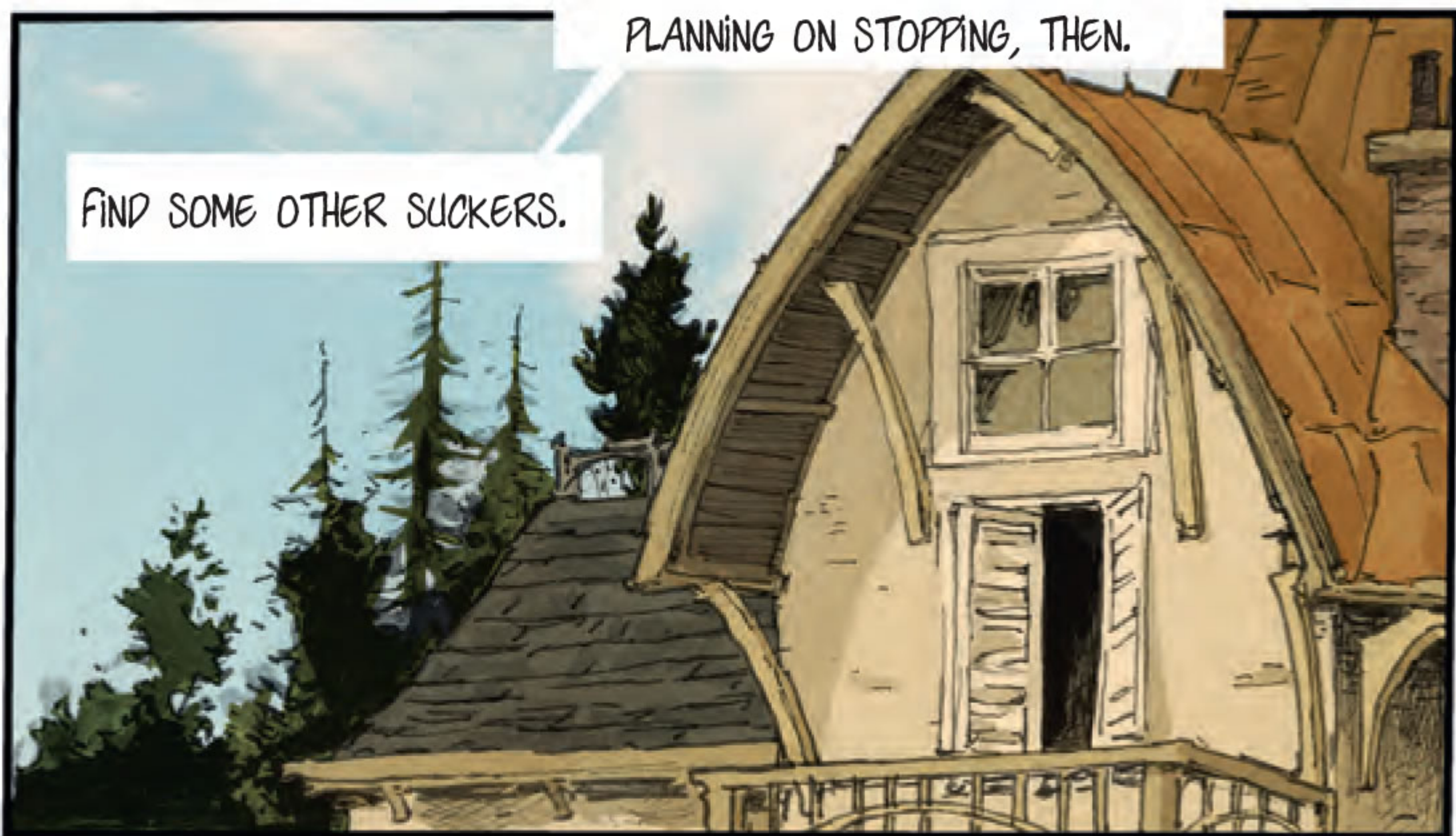


IF YOU'RE YOUNG, HANDSOME,
AND COME CARRYING GREAT
RICHES, YOU CAN KNOCK ON THE
DOOR AND THE HOUSE WILL
WELCOME YOU INSIDE...



...BUT IF YOU COME EMPTY HANDED
AND SICK, IF YOU'VE BEEN MARKED
BY AGE OR INJURY, THEY WON'T
EVEN HEAR YOUR FISTS UPON
THE DOOR...!

IT'S A GOOD THING WE WEREN'T
PLANNING ON STOPPING, THEN.



FIND SOME OTHER SUCKERS.



FRANCOIS, WHAT WAS
THAT SCATTERBRAIN
TALKING ABOUT?

YOU DON'T KNOW
THAT PLACE?

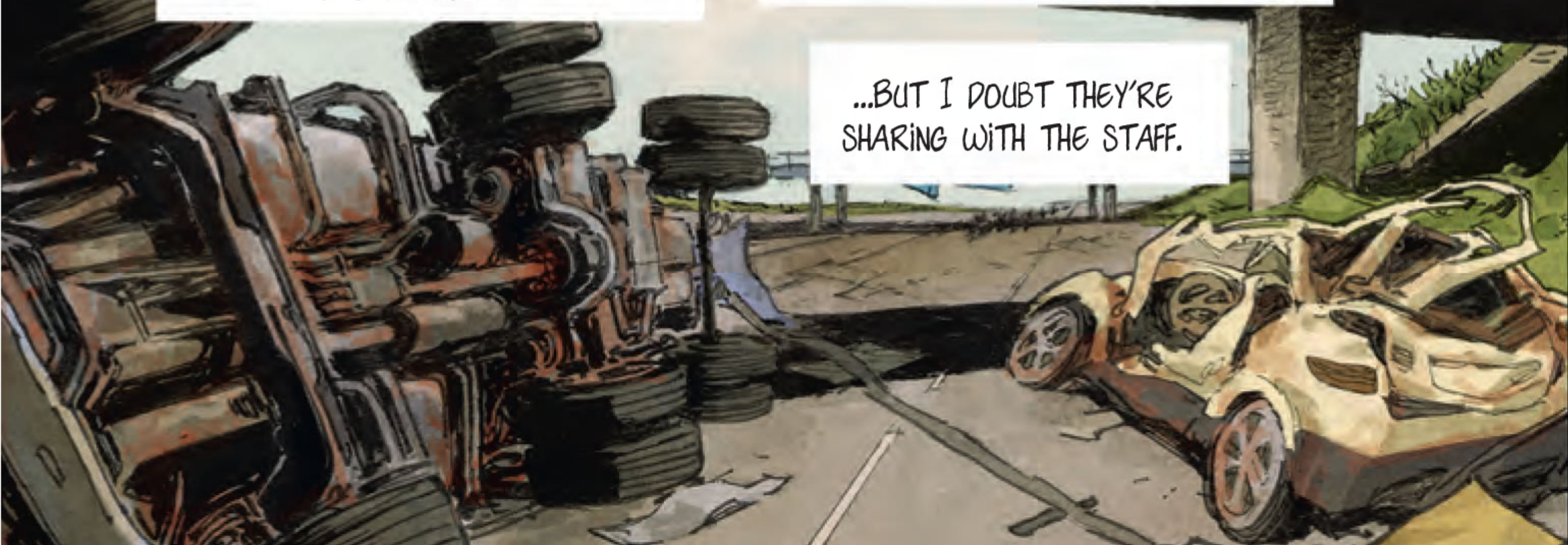
I'M SURE SEITA HAS
BEEN THERE... LIKE ALL
PARISIANS, PROBABLY.



IT'S THE DELTA, THE MOST FAMOUS
BROTHEL IN THE CAPITAL. AND THAT
OLD MAN WAS A HAWKER WHO
PROBABLY LOST HIS MIND
FROM HUNGER...

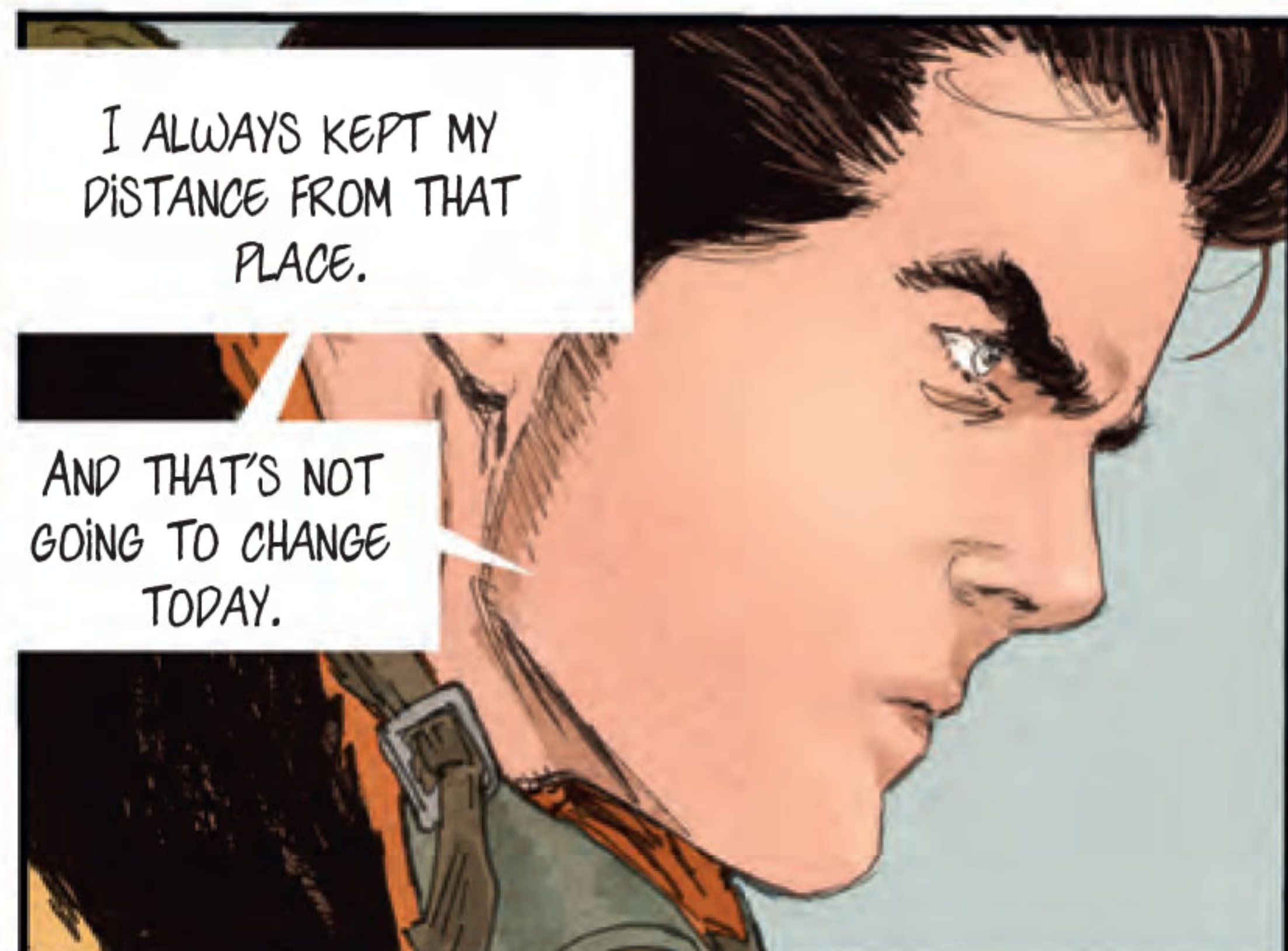
MAYBE THE GIRLS GET PAID IN
SUPPLIES NOW, HOPING TO HOLD
OUT UNTIL BETTER DAYS...

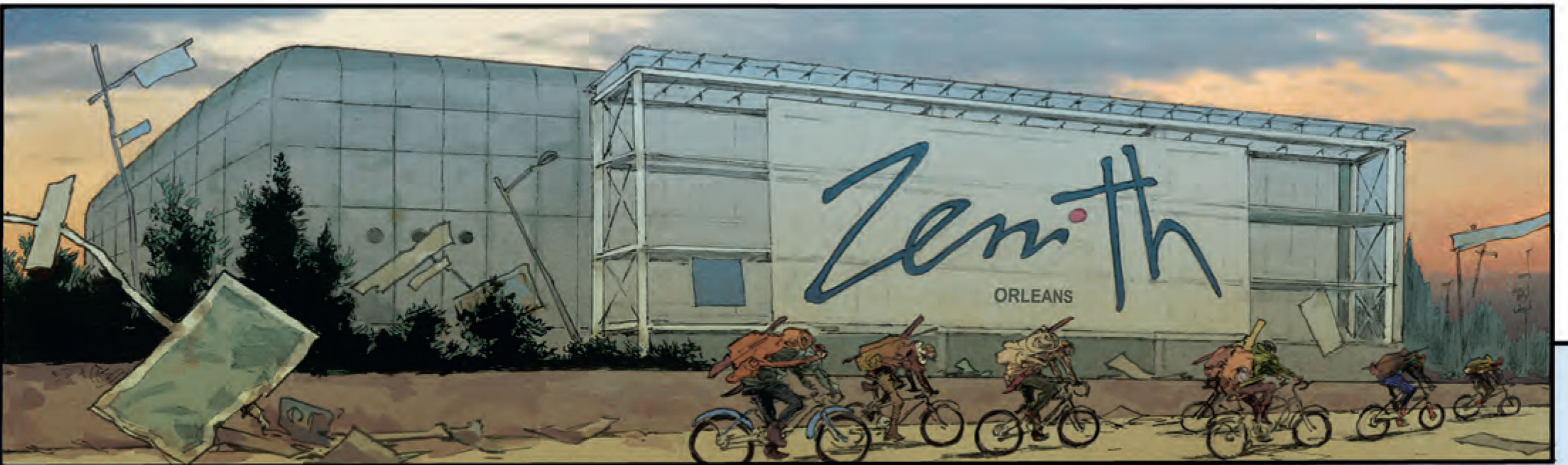
...BUT I DOUBT THEY'RE
SHARING WITH THE STAFF.



I ALWAYS KEPT MY
DISTANCE FROM THAT
PLACE.

AND THAT'S NOT
GOING TO CHANGE
TODAY.













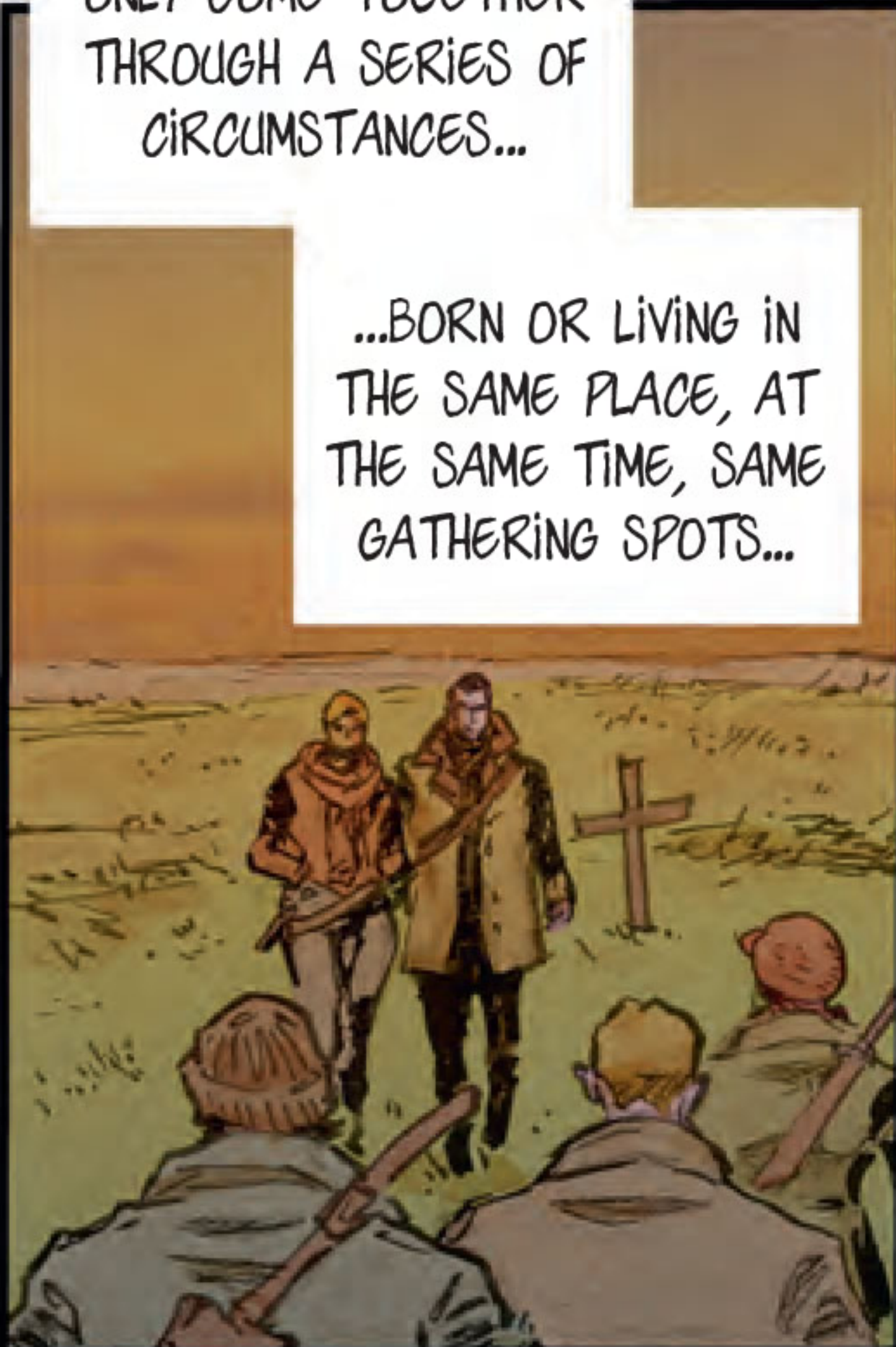
ARE YOU SURE THAT'S A GOOD IDEA, FRANÇOIS?



WHAT DO YOU MEAN, BLANCHE?

TAKING THOSE THREE GUYS WITH US.

THEY KILLED POOR GEORGE.



YOU KNOW HUMANS ONLY COME TOGETHER THROUGH A SERIES OF CIRCUMSTANCES...

...BORN OR LIVING IN THE SAME PLACE, AT THE SAME TIME, SAME GATHERING SPOTS...



THEIR ENEMIES ARE JUST LIKE THEM: THEY WANT THE SAME THINGS. THAT CREATES CONFLICT.

THEY COULD'VE JUST AS EASILY BEEN FRIENDS IF THEY WEREN'T AFRAID EACH OTHER.



LOOK AT WHAT WE DID TO THE BUTCHER. WAS THAT ANY BETTER?

BUT WE DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE. SO I CONVINCED OUR GROUP THAT WE WERE THE GOOD GUYS.

IT REASSURED THEM AND GALVANIZED THEM.



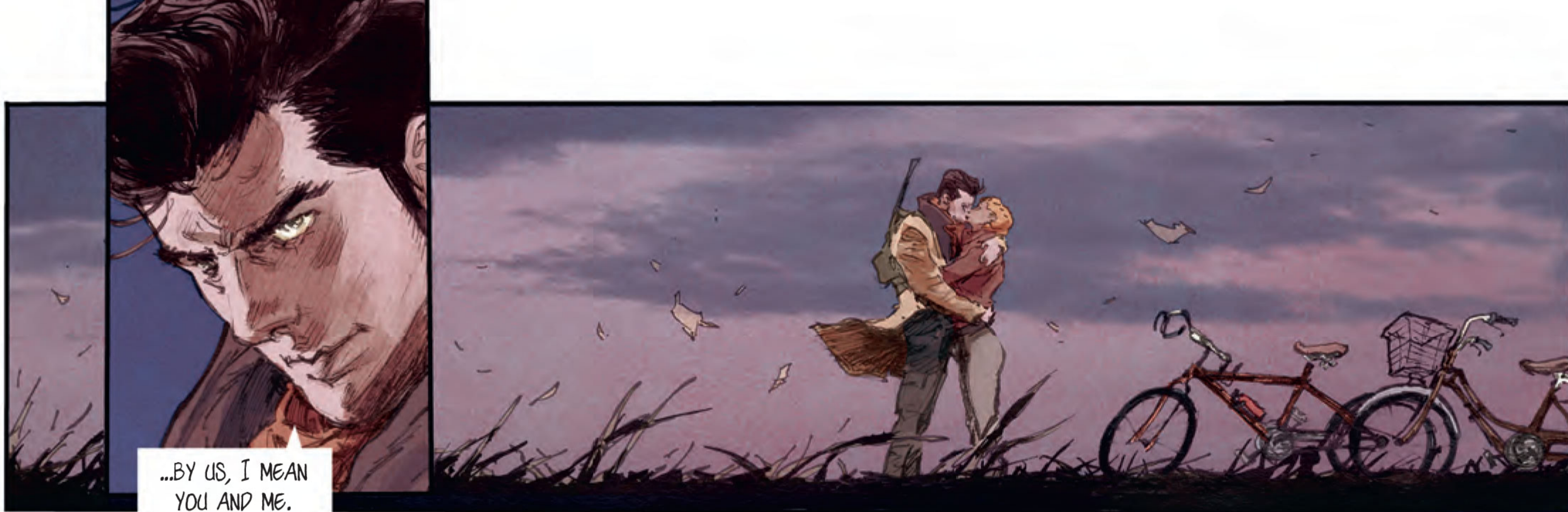
BUT IN THE END, WE'RE ALL THE SAME.

IN DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES, ONE OF US COULD'VE ENDED UP WITH THEM, OR VISA VERSA.

THE ONLY THING THAT'S CERTAIN IS THAT THE MORE OF US THERE ARE, THE BETTER OUR CHANCES OF SURVIVAL...



PLUS, THOSE THREE CAME SO CLOSE TO DEATH I'LL BE ABLE TO SEND THEM INTO DANGER TO PROTECT US...



...BY US, I MEAN
YOU AND ME.



DIDN'T THE SUN
SET ALREADY?



YEAH, A GOOD
WHILE AGO. DON'T
YOU REMEMBER?

NO, I DO...
THAT'S WHY I'M
WONDERING...



...WHY WE CAN SEE OUR
SHADOWS SO CLEARLY IN
THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.

?!



IT COULD BE...



...A HUGE FIRE!

IT'S HEADED
STRAIGHT FOR
CAMP!



JUST WHAT WE NEEDED...

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!

WE HAVE TO GO AROUND IT!



IMPOSSIBLE. IT'S KILOMETERS WIDE!

HOW FAST IS IT MOVING?



GIVEN THE WIND... FASTER THAN WE CAN RUN.

WE CAN TRY...

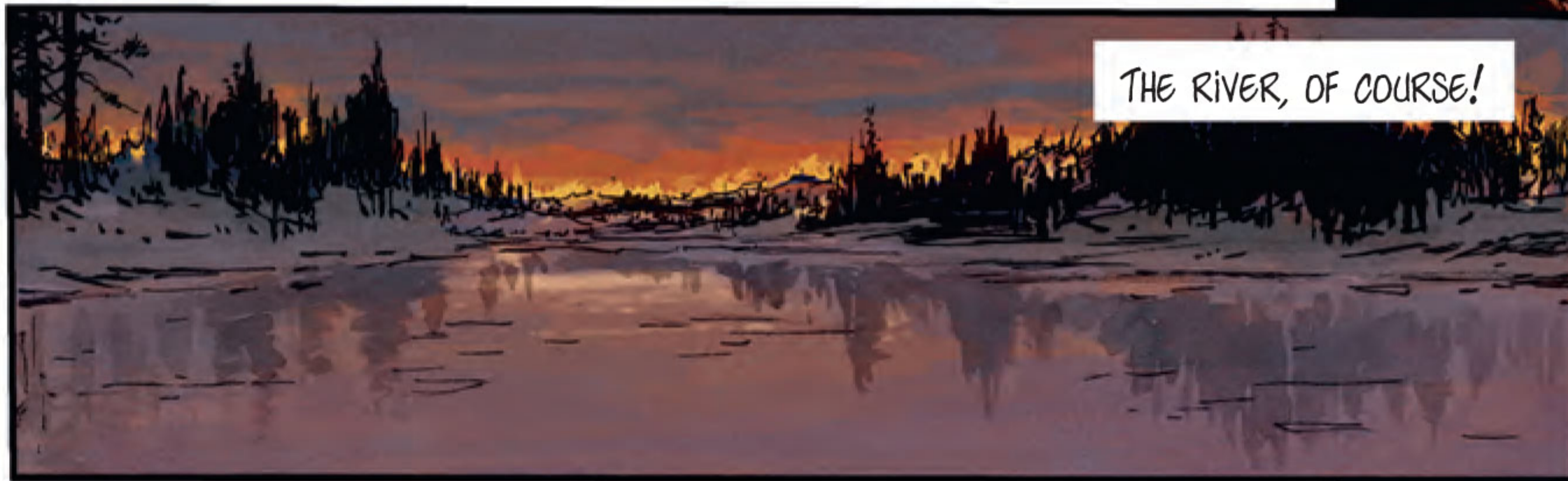
LET'S GO, WE CAN'T LOSE ANY TIME!

WE MIGHT HAVE A CHANCE!



WE DO NEED TO MOVE, TRUE... BUT LET'S ANALYZE THE SITUATION...

...OUR BEST OPTION IS TO OUR LEFT.



THE RIVER, OF COURSE!



AND WHAT ABOUT THOSE OF US WHO CAN'T SWIM?

IF THEY HAVE FIREPROOF BODIES, THEN I GUESS THEY DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT...



LET'S BUILD A RAFT!

LOOK, THE FIRST CINDERS ARE ALREADY IN THE AIR... THE FIRE WILL BE HERE IN LESS THAN AN HOUR!



THOSE TWO TREES NEED TO BE CUT DOWN IN THE NEXT FIFTEEN MINUTES!



TIMBER!



WATCH OUT, IT'S
FALLING TOWARD
YOU!



NOOOO!



THE PRINT WORKER
WAS KILLED BY
WHAT HE KILLED...

POOR GUY...



PRUNE THE TRUNKS,
CUT THEM DOWN AND
GET THE CABLES OUT
OF YOUR BAGS!

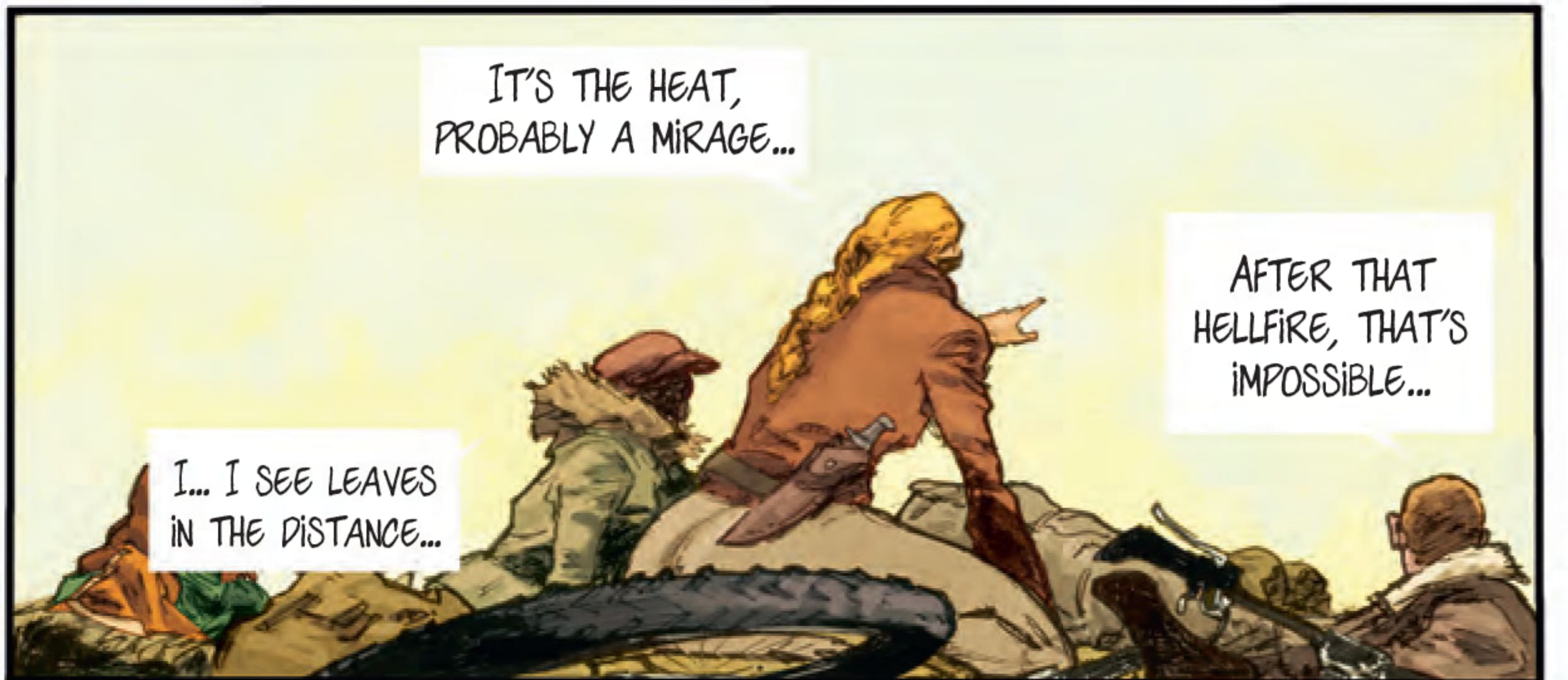


MOVE FASTER!





?!!



IT'S THE HEAT,
PROBABLY A MIRAGE...

AFTER THAT
HELLFIRE, THAT'S
IMPOSSIBLE...

I... I SEE LEAVES
IN THE DISTANCE...



NO, LOOK!

IT'S AN ISLAND!



I'M GOING TO SEE IF
THE INHABITANTS OF THIS
OASIS ARE WELCOMING.



I'M COMING
WITH YOU.

ME TOO.

THIS PLACE REMINDS
ME OF SOMETHING...



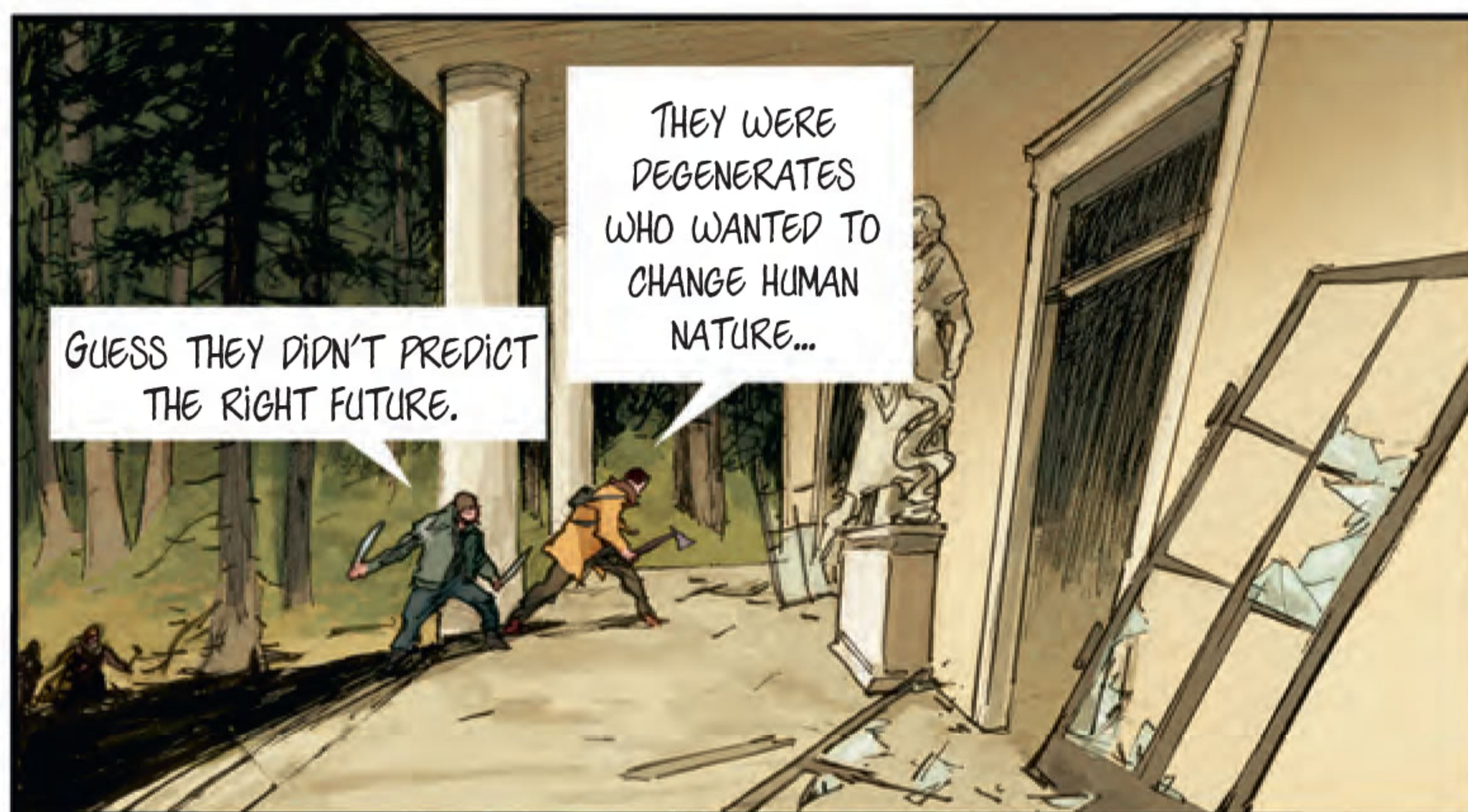
I THOUGHT SO... THE WORK
THOSE PSEUDO-SCIENTISTS
ALWAYS SCARED ME.



WHAT WERE THEY STUDYING?

ETERNAL LIFE.

PROFESSOR OSLO AND HIS
TRANSHUMANIST FOLLOWERS WERE
OBSESSED WITH IT.



GUESS THEY DIDN'T PREDICT
THE RIGHT FUTURE.

THEY WERE
DEGENERATES
WHO WANTED TO
CHANGE HUMAN
NATURE...



THAT COULD NEVER
END WELL...



IT LOOKS ABANDONED.

LET'S GO INSIDE,
WE MIGHT FIND
SOME PROVISIONS.

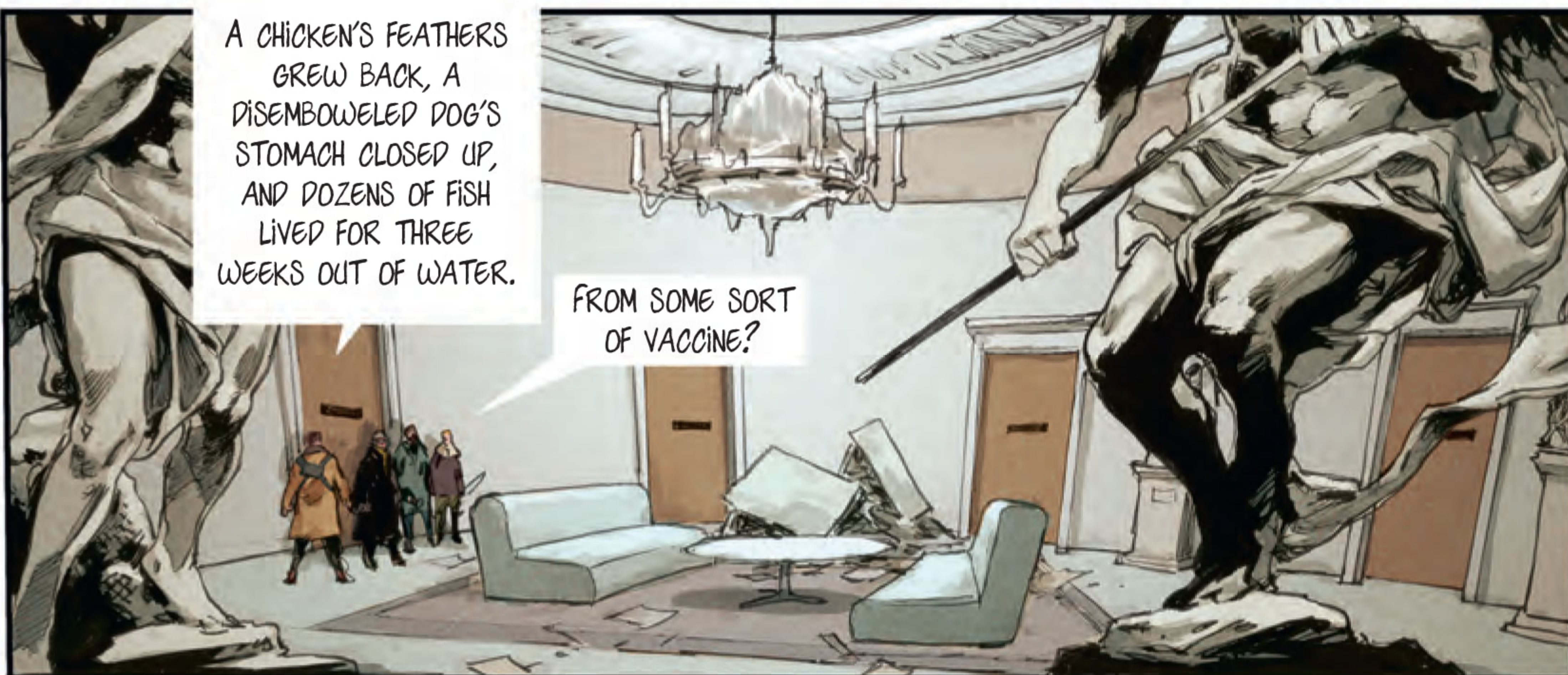
OR MAYBE
SOMETHING MORE,
WHO KNOWS?

I NEVER LOOKED AT THEIR EXPERIMENTS, BUT I HEARD THAT A GUINEA PIG INFECTED WITH COVID-49 RECOVERED TO FULL HEALTH IN A MATTER OF HOURS...



AN ADULT COW'S FRACTURED HOOF BONES REPAIRED THEMSELVES IN ONE NIGHT....

A CHICKEN'S FEATHERS GREW BACK, A DISEMBOWELED DOG'S STOMACH CLOSED UP, AND DOZENS OF FISH LIVED FOR THREE WEEKS OUT OF WATER.



FROM SOME SORT OF VACCINE?

IT'S SIMILAR, BUT IN REALITY, THEY'RE CALLED NANOMACHINES.

MILLIONS OF LITTLE "ROBOTS" BY THE GALLON?

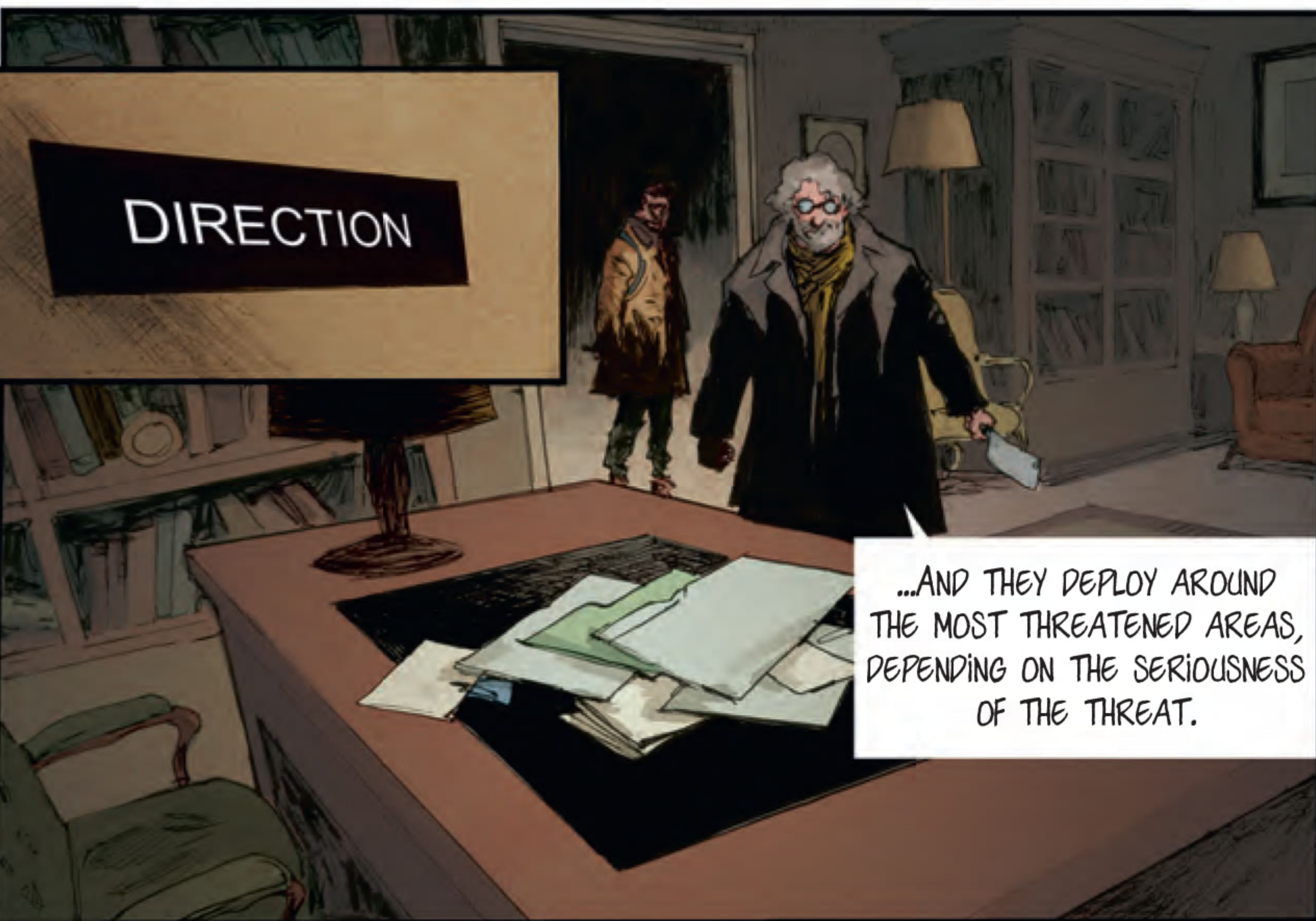
THAT'S ONE WAY TO PUT IT.

IT GIVES A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF ENERGY TO THE ORGANISM THEY INHABIT...

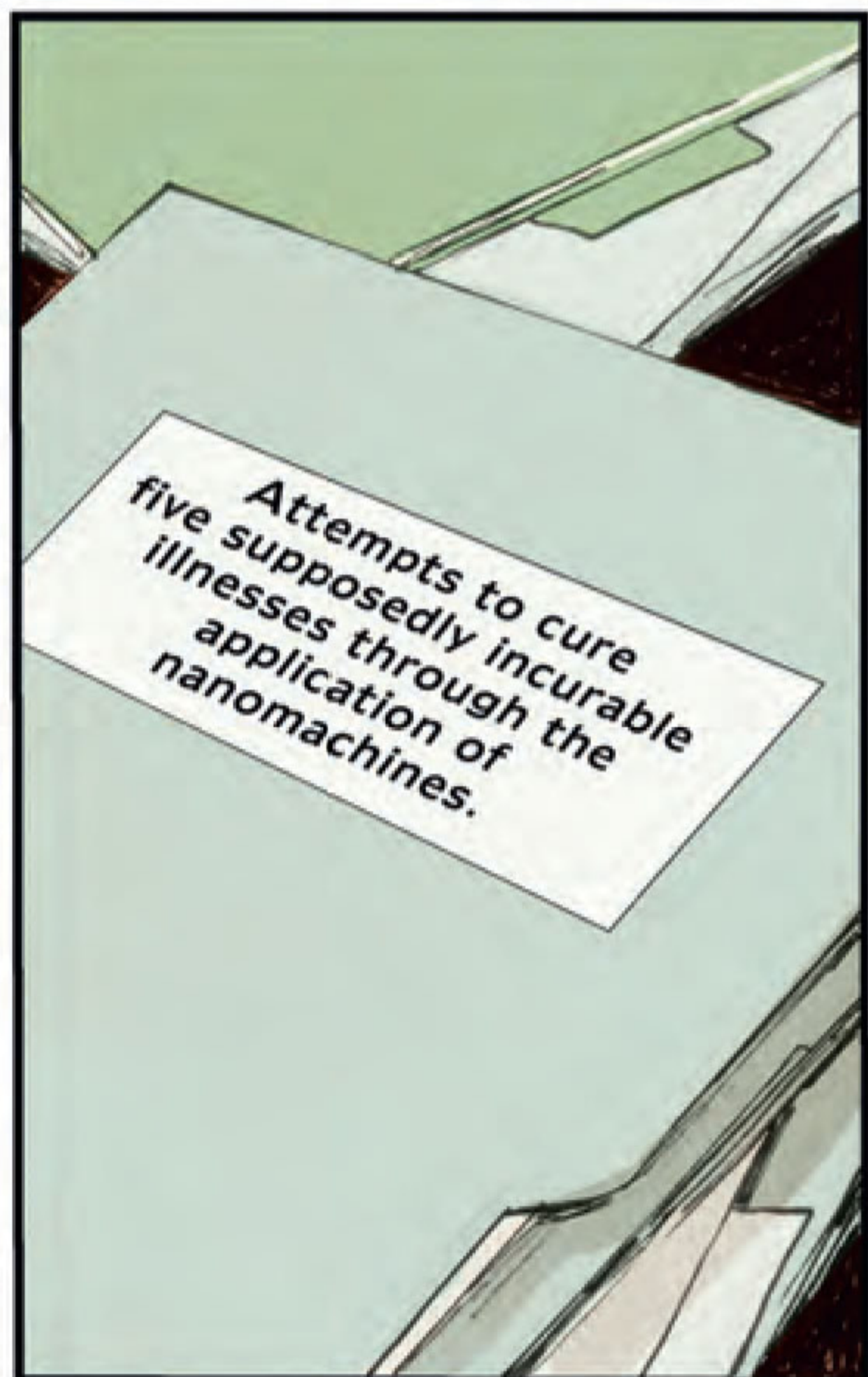


DIRECTION

...AND THEY DEPLOY AROUND THE MOST THREATENED AREAS, DEPENDING ON THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE THREAT.



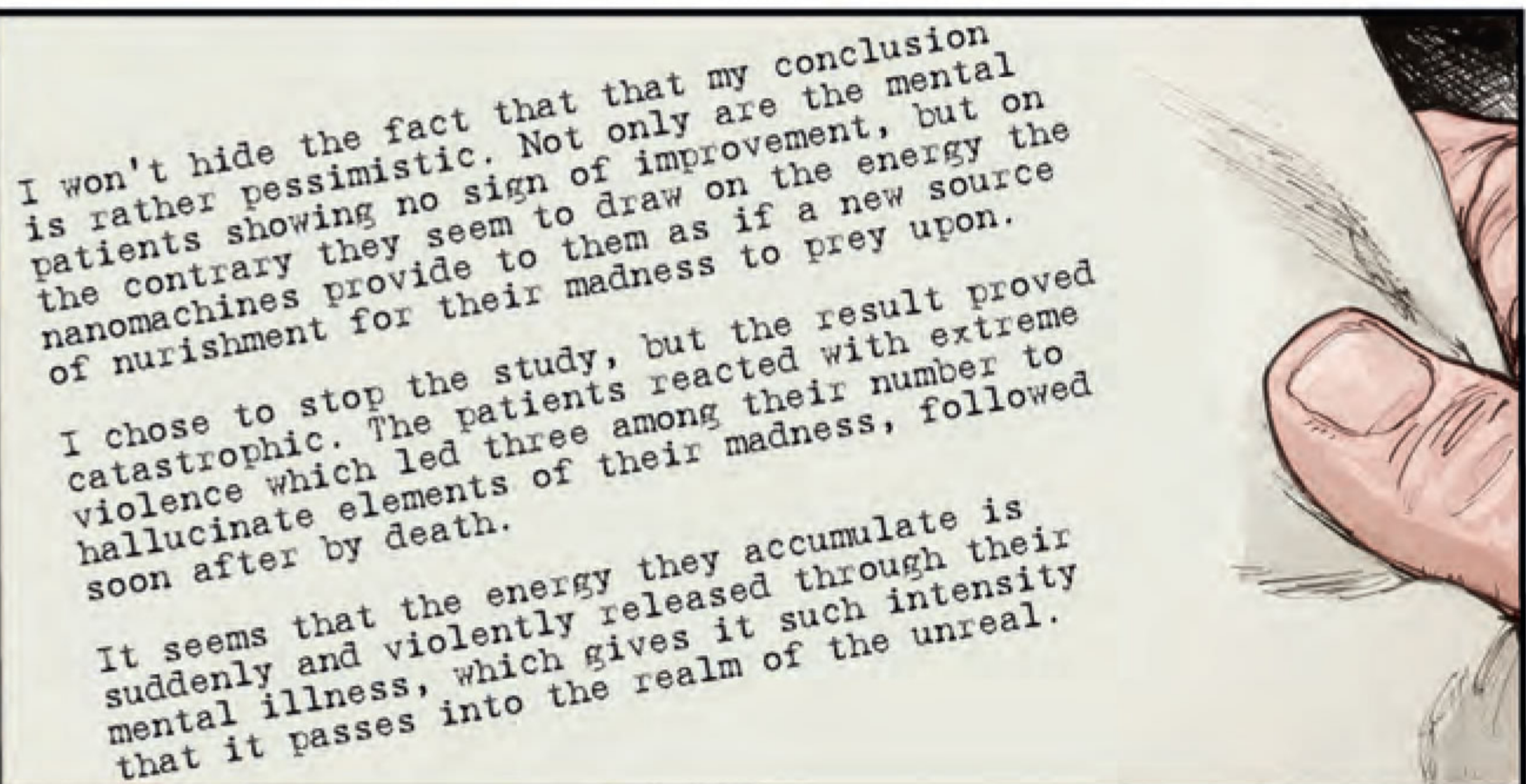
Attempts to cure five supposedly incurable illnesses through the application of nanomachines.

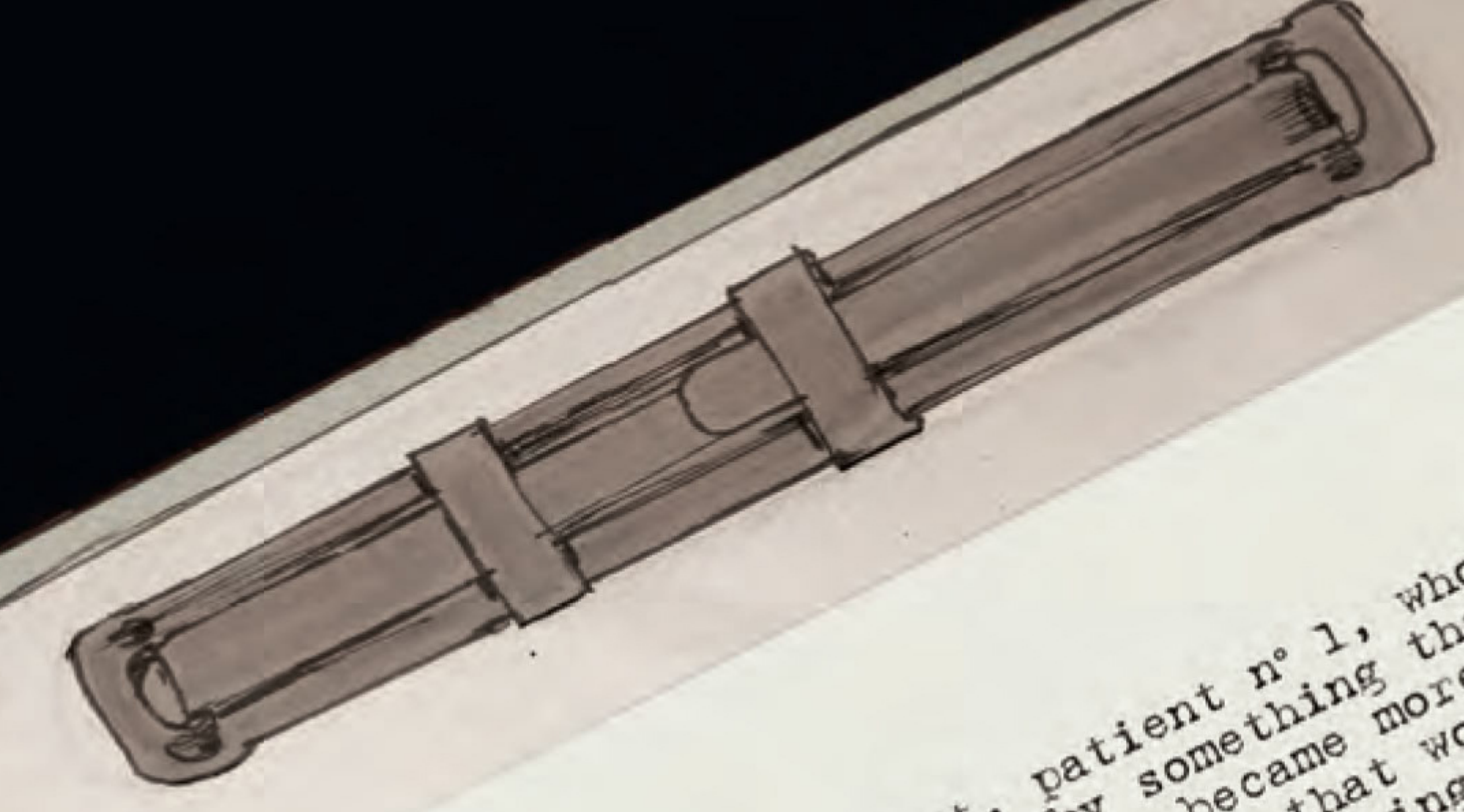


FRANCOIS, I'D LIKE TO READ THESE FILES.

LET ME KNOW WHEN WE'RE LEAVING.

UNDERSTOOD, DOCTOR.





At the cessation of the treatment, patient n° 1, who believed himself to be Joan of Arc, was quickly afflicted by something that started as the rapid proliferation of urticaria but quickly became more severe. The inflammation turned into deep wounds, similar to those that would be left by deep burns. Over the few hours, the wounds deepened, burning all the way to the bone, as the skin turned a charred black, and his flesh decomposed leaving behind the atrocious stench of grilled pork. The joy of a person finally living from a dream, by a fire that his frenzied will turned from illusion to reality, fed by the enormous quantity of energy that he had stored up, and suddenly released.

Patient n° 4 died in ten minutes, emptied of his blood by 23 wounds which opened up across his abdomen one after another. His last words were: "Et tu, Brute?" He believed himself to be Julius César.

Patient n° 5, a weakling who believed himself to be Hercules, was revealed to have gained a lot of weight even though his body had not visibly grown or changed. The same night we stopped the treatment, he pulverized the door to his cell, overwhelmed the nurses with his fists, and ran off.

In the middle of the night, the director of the Institute was informed that his fugitive patient was starting on the demigod's Labors, broke into a women's school and had undertaken, according to the students and was reattempting his thirteenth trial. Nobody could stop him. Only escape saved a few of the women. But most of the young girls fell prey to a sort of strange languor which stripped them of any ability to leave. At least, according to what they said. Awakened by one of the victims, the headmistress of the school called the police, who brought down the madman before he could complete his task.

The police's interjection is regrettable. It is very unfortunate for science that n° 5 was not left to continue his exploits.

The two other patients, Jesus Christ and the demigod, have shed



patient
5
Hercule



-puissance
poids
soudaine
-puissance
extraordinaire



NOBODY ON THE
GROUND FLOOR OR
UP ABOVE.

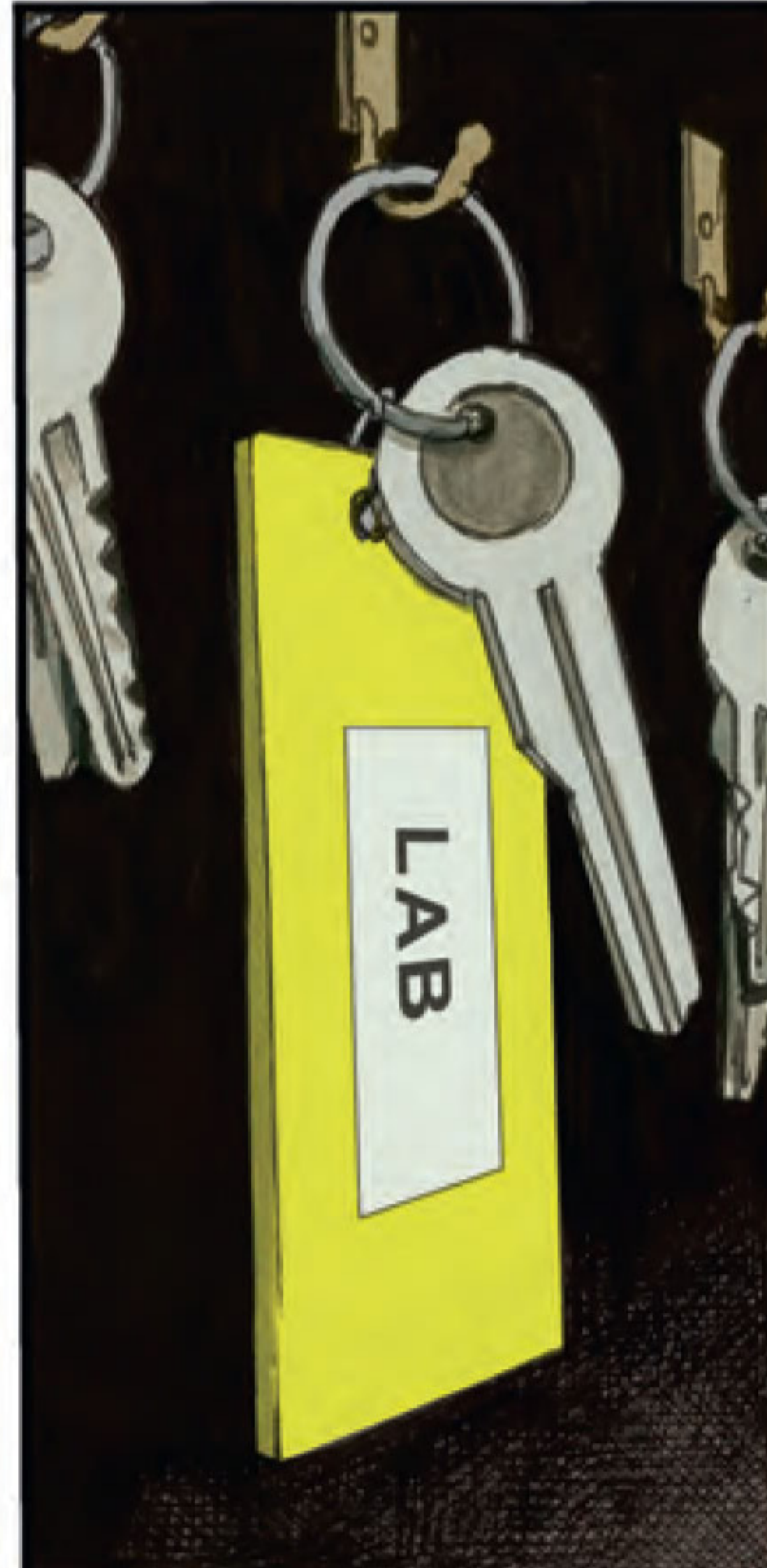
EVERYONE MUST HAVE LEFT
AFTER THE CATASTROPHE.
PATIENTS, NURSES, AND
DOCTORS. THE BASEMENT
IS LOCKED BEHIND A
REINFORCED DOOR AND I
HAVEN'T FOUND THE KEY.

BEFORE WE DECIDE
WHETHER TO CAMP HERE,
I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT'S
DOWN THERE.



THAT REINFORCED
DOOR MUST LEAD
TO OSLO'S CELLS...

...AND THESE MUST
BE THE KEYS.



LET'S GO! I'M
CURIOUS TO LEARN
MORE ABOUT THIS
PLACE.



THE GENERATORS
STILL WORK...

GIVEN THE NATURE OF
THEIR EXPERIMENTS, THEY
DREADED THE IDEA OF
BEING WITHOUT POWER.





THE CELLS ARE ON EITHER SIDE, AND
THE LABORATORY IS AT THE END.



THERE WERE FIVE MEN DOWN
HERE WHO UNDERWENT SOME
STRANGE TREATMENT THAT
LED TO THREE SUPPOSED
"MIRACLES"...



BURNED,
AS I
THOUGHT.



LET'S GO SEE THE
"NEW HERCULES"
IN CELL 5...



CAN A HUMAN REALLY BE
THAT STRONG?

CLEARLY HE WENT AT IT
FOR DAYS BEFORE DYING
OF THIRST...



WHOA! COME AND
LOOK AT THIS!

IS THAT
"CHRIST'S" CELL?



...